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RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC PRIORITY
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RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC//J-3/J-5// PRIORITY
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ANKARA 001070

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/07/2022

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SUBJECT: PERSPECTIVES ON THE TURKISH MILITARY'S POLITICAL
GAMBIT

REF: ANKARA 861

Classified By: Pol-Mil Counselor Carl Siebentritt, reasons 1.4 (b/d)

11. (C) Summary: The effects of the Turkish General Staff's (TGS) April 27 "midnight memo" continue to be debated in Ankara. Universally regarded as a stern warning targeting an Abdullah Gul presidency, the military's message was justified in the view of our secular establishment contacts who do not wish to see Gul become president and believe the military acted appropriately in performing its constitutional duty to protect the secular state. Meanwhile, contacts in the ruling AK party have sought to play down the effect of the military intervention, which they regard as unnecessary and harmful to Turkey's image, while confidently preparing for July parliamentary elections. The TGS may have been surprised by press and public criticism of the memo and has reportedly enlisted the support of prominent academics and journalists to explain its views to the public. End summary.

Coup by Memorandum?

12. (C) While most observers are not yet ready to characterize the military's April 27 website message as a "post-post-modern" or soft coup, they acknowledge that it had a dramatic effect on the presidential election process. Ankara University Communications Professor Bedriye Poyraz described the TGS web posting as a "muhtira" or an edict, something close to an order. The wording was blunt, and in her and others' view, it is a clear warning by the military. According to Poyraz, if the AK Party heeds the warning and puts up a more moderate candidate for president in the future (assuming the AKP forms the next government following elections expected in July), then the TGS message will be regarded as a coup by memorandum.

13. (C) Our contacts in the secular establishment either welcomed the military's web-based intervention or at least found it justifiable. Parliamentary advisor Kemal Kaya termed the message "appropriate" and "professional." He and others with whom we have met in recent days have told us that while they do not wish to see a military coup in the traditional sense, they feared a dynamic AKP political figure as president. A Turkish defense contractor stated that he did not want a coup, but the TGS message showed how serious the worry was about an Islamic agenda that Gul would bring to the presidency and that the military was only performing its

proper role. Kaya and others thought the TGS "political file" is still open and that further military intervention is possible.

14. (C) AKP deputies Vahit Erdem and Huseyin Tanriverdi sought to play down the effect of the TGS statement, while acknowledging that it damaged Turkey's image. Erdem told us the statement was but one of several factors, including the April 29 Istanbul demonstration and inflammatory rhetoric by opposition CHP leader Baykal, that could have influenced the Constitutional Court to rule against the AKP. Focusing on early parliamentary elections, a relaxed Tanriverdi predicted that the military's intervention would only make the AKP stronger and noted that civil society had not automatically fallen in line behind the TGS as in the past. Both AK MPs said they were heartened by the maturity demonstrated by the Turkish public and press in the preceding days. Erdem claimed his party would act more carefully in the future and predicted the military would find no justification for further intervention.

Justification and Timing

15. (C) The Gul nomination surprised the TGS, according to most of our contacts. Retired Navy officer Yilmaz Aklar, currently working at the ASAM thinktank, told us that the TGS had sent a clear message to the AKP about the kind of moderate candidate it would accept. In Aklar's view, GEN Buyukanit's April 12 speech (reftel) was too soft and the AK party did not take its implicit warnings seriously enough. Bilkent University Professor Ersel Aydinli and others speculated that the TGS had understood from Erdogan that

ANKARA 00001070 002 OF 002

Minister of Defense Gonul -- a moderate figure whose wife does not wear a headscarf -- would be the AKP's nominee for president. When that did not happen, the TGS reacted as if it had been "tricked or cheated," according to Aydinli.

16. (C) The timing of the message, at just before midnight on a Friday night, added to the drama and impact, according to almost all observers. GEN (Ret) Armagan Kuloglu told us that the hour of the message's release was carefully chosen by the TGS for its psychological impact. Its effect would have been quite different, Kuloglu said, if it had been released at 10:00 a.m. during the height of the business day. Many have noted that the Friday night timing also ensured financial markets would not be immediately affected.

Popular and Press Reaction a Surprise?

17. (C) Former parliamentary advisor and Ankara University professor Metin Kazanci speculated that the TGS, long accustomed to near universal public approbation, was taken aback by press and public criticism of the April 27 memo. He reported that he and seven other academics were invited to lunch at TGS headquarters on May 4, where senior officers defended the legitimacy of the intervention and reiterated TGS determination to take action when necessary, while stating their preference for a political solution. The officers asked for the support of the academics in explaining their views to students and the public, and said they would brief prominent journalists in a similar fashion.

Divisions Within the TGS?

18. (C) There has been speculation about whether the April 27 announcement represented the views of CHOD Buyukanit or was an initiative of more junior officers. Several contacts noted that the style and grammar of the message differed significantly from the CHOD's earlier statements, including his April 12 press address. Other contacts, including Halil Sivgin, an NGO executive with long contact with senior

officers, described significant ideological divisions within the officer corps, claiming that junior officers have been agitating for action against the ruling party for some time.

19. (C) Most believe, however, that the April 27 statement does reflect GEN Buyukanit's views. Some believe it was hastily prepared and posted, while most think that it was prepared well in advance and the timing of its release was driven by the failed presidential vote in parliament earlier the same day and to take advantage of a large anti-AKP demonstration planned for Istanbul 36 hours later. ASAM's Aklar suggested that the statement was crafted by a very small group at the top of the TGS, which could have included the CHOD, Deputy CHOD, J-2, and TGS Secretary General. Professor Poyraz and most others do not believe the message would have been posted or allowed to remain on the TGS website without the approval of the top officers.

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